

January 19, 2012

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

You don't have to be a long-distance runner to benefit from exercise—but I try anyway!

Once again this past week, I joined 1,623 runners, including a score from NCH, in the 26<sup>th</sup> annual *Naples Daily News Half Marathon*. Fitness, of course, is the best preventive medicine, and the annual run is a good example of why our county remains the healthiest of the 67 in Florida.

We in Collier County, with our moderate year-round climate, are blessed to have so many other opportunities to enjoy the benefits of outdoor exercise. Even small amounts of exercise can boost health, with only 20 minutes a day lowering the risk of coronary heart disease by 14%. What might that entail for you? Well, five laps around the glorious Garden of Hope and Courage, adjacent to our downtown campus, equal one mile. Six laps around the brand new and beautiful Beatrice Branch Briggs Founders Park, just south of the downtown Wellness Center, equal another pleasant mile walk. A brisk jaunt on either of these two “courses” can change your health for the better. Our North Naples Campus also has a lovely pond, which could easily serve as a recreational and rehabilitation area for patients in the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging and Rehabilitation which is part of the 325-bed campus.

People wonder if walking really benefits health. You bet it does. Brisk walking increases blood flow by as much as 15%, according to research presented at a recent Experimental Biology meeting. What many of our 6,700 Wellness members do goes beyond light exercise. At our two centers (at Immokalee Road in the Greentree Shopping Center near the North Naples Campus, and on the Downtown Campus), they find 205 classes each week offering choices for every fitness ranging from traditional spinning to the more exotic Zumba, Kick, Power, Cross Training, Lifelong Fitness, Chair Yoga and Balance, Tai Chi, Osted, Prenatal, Mommy and Me, Boot Camp and many others.

One reason fitness is so essential has to do with our nation's obesity epidemic, which threatens to result in an alarming number of the current generation of children predeceasing their parents. A staggering 61% of Floridians are overweight, obese, or morbidly obese. Florida's rate of obesity has increased more than 80% in the last 15 years. So we need to fight this menace ferociously.

*The Safe and Healthy Children's Coalition of Collier County*, led by **Dr. Todd Vedder**, Chairman of Pediatrics, is leading the charge on the plague of children's obesity. First target for Dr. Vedder and a motivated group of pediatricians is Golden Gate Zip Code 34116, where three public elementary schools have obesity rates above 25%. The doctors are attacking the problem in four broad areas: (1) Developing a consistent wellness message for parents; (2) Maximizing caloric burn during physical activity and free play periods; (3) Increasing fitness opportunities and healthy food choices in the community; and (4) Increasing the percentage of mothers in the area who are exclusively breast-feeding their children at two, four and six months. Results will be closely monitored.

Keeping fit benefits everyone from long-distance runners to elementary school children and all of us in between. If Collier County is to maintain its status as the leader in the nation in terms of longest life expectancy for a woman and the second longest for a man, we at NCH have a special responsibility to promote wellness, prevent illness and, consequently, lower healthcare costs for all of us.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at [allen.weiss@nchmd.org](mailto:allen.weiss@nchmd.org) to be added.